



## **Appreciate: Cards to support appreciative partnership learning**

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Sarah Dyer

*In partnership with:*



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## About the author

Sarah Dyer is a senior lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Exeter. She has research interests in education, work in knowledge economies, the production and circulation of knowledge, and gender and embodiment. Her research in these areas is primarily qualitative, using in-depth interviews and participant observation. Sarah is a committee member of the Royal Geographic Society's Higher Education Research Group and co-ordinates a network of teaching-focused academic in Geography Earth and Environmental Sciences (search for 'THE GEES network' on LinkedIn). Her interest in academic-student partnership developed through her own attempts to undertake research with students investigating gendered learning in Science, Technology and Mathematics.

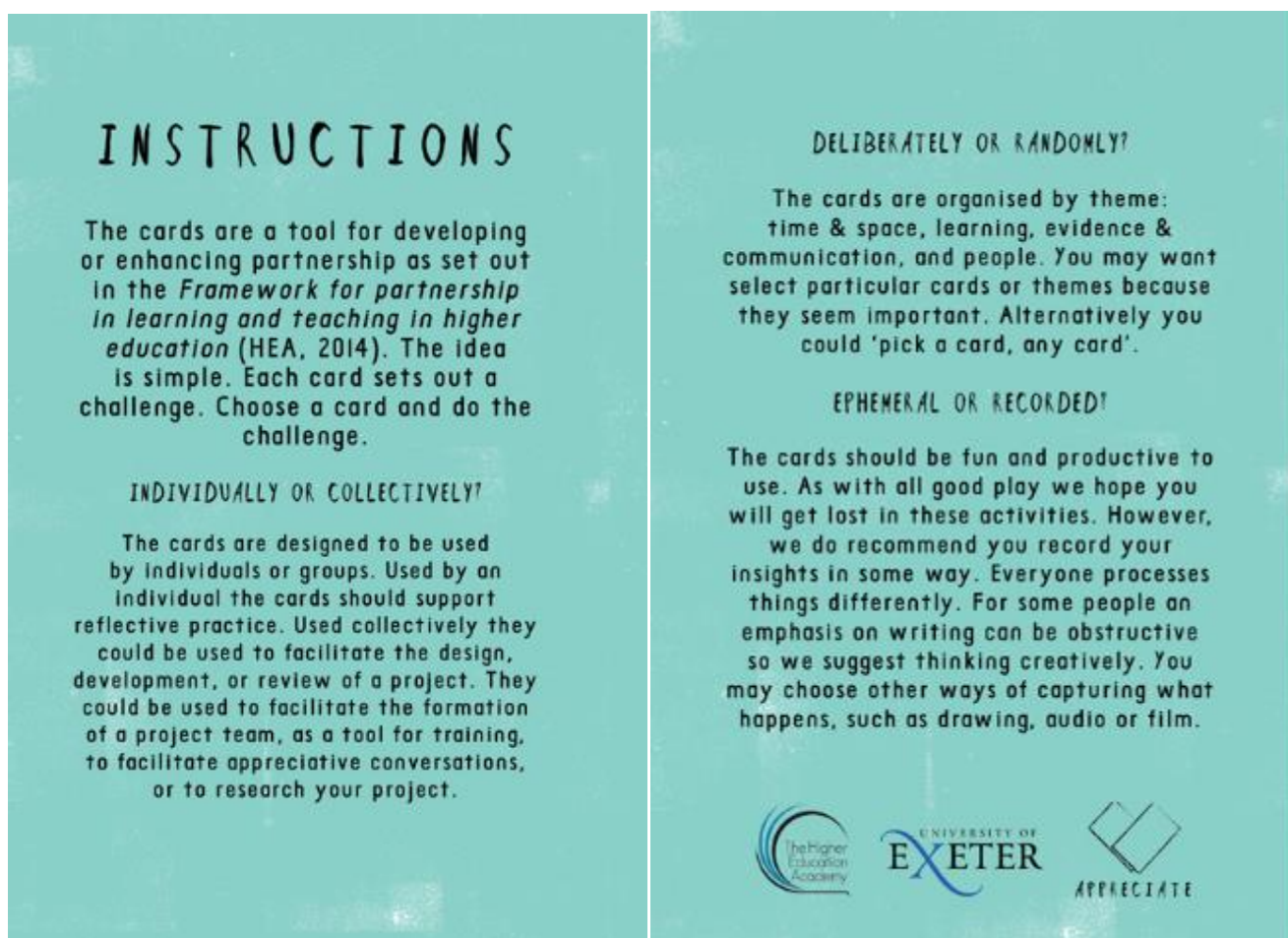
## Acknowledgements

This project was funded by the Higher Education Academy and the University of Exeter. It has benefited from the support of Abbi Flint and Karen Fraser at the HEA and Corony Edwards at the University of Exeter. I would like to thank all of the interview participants who were so generous with their time, stories, and ideas. Nia Gould has brought the cards to life with her brilliant illustrations. Bruce McClure, Lucy Dixon, and Jo Hornsey have read (and re-read) the resource and accompanying booklets. All four have had an enormous impact on how the *Appreciate* cards look and feel. I would also like to acknowledge the inspiration and generosity of Johanna Holtan. Edinburgh's 'Third Space' has been an inspiration.



# 1. Who is *Appreciate* for?

*Appreciate: Cards to support appreciative partnership learning* is a tool to support the Higher Education Academy's (2014) *Framework for partnership in learning and teaching in higher education*. The cards are designed to be used by staff (academic and professional services) and students in higher education institutions (HEIs) who are seeking to develop or enhance partnership learning. These may be partnerships between staff and students, among students, or between HEIs and their students' unions, associations, or guilds. Using the cards enables you to learn from the experiences of members of successful partnerships. The challenges set out on each card are prompts to think through key issues which others have found to impact on their partnership.



## *Appreciate* Instruction cards

*Appreciate* is designed to be a flexible resource. It can be used as a tool to aid individual reflective practice or as a framework for collective activities which facilitate the designing/planning, training, or review/development of a partnership learning community. *Appreciate* includes instructions for how to use the cards. If you are considering using

*Appreciate*, you can assess whether it will be more productive for you to adopt a systematic approach (for example, by theme), approach it as a game of chance or, in the spirit of *Appreciate*, to experiment with different ways of using the cards.

You may find other contexts in which *Appreciate* can productively be used. Examples might include supporting transition to University or project planning. The cards challenge us to think about issues such as how to learn well, what University means to us, and how we can communicate better. There are many situations which would benefit from reflective engagement with questions such as these.

## Glossary

*Appreciate* – The challenges set out on cards described in this document.

*Appreciate* informant/interviewee – Someone who has taken part in an interview which has informed the development of *Appreciate*

Ethics Committee – A committee that reviews a research proposal to ensure that it is not designed in a way that is likely to cause harm to anyone.

Higher Education Institution (HEI)/University/Institution – An institution or organisation which facilitates people studying for degrees.

Partnership – A way of working with others where everyone is treated as equal and can share in the benefits of the work. In other words where “all involved are actively engaged in and stand to gain from the process of working together to foster engaged student learning and engaging learning and teaching enhancement” (Higher Education Academy 2014; 2).

Partnership learning community – A community who are engaged in partnership learning; a means of achieving and sustaining partnership learning and embedding it in an institution’s ethos and culture (Higher Education Academy 2014; 4).

Qualitative methods – Research methods which collect non-numeric data: observations, stories, ideas and thoughts.

Semi-structured interview – Interviews where the interviewer has a set of questions to ask but encourages the interviewee to direct the conversation too.

Values – What we take to be important. In this context, they concern the way we behave and treat others.



## 2. Values



Values take centre stage in the *Framework for partnership in learning and teaching in higher education* (Higher Education Academy 2014).

*Appreciate* was developed using methods aligned with those values – see below. Using *Appreciate* will support the conditions for those same values to flourish in your partnership. The tool invites those who use it to enrich their learning, their HEI, and its community through thoughtful and creative interactions. It has been designed to enact those values, in particular:

*Appreciate* **trusts** those who will use it. The different contexts in which partnerships take place mean that a tool can't be a 'one-size-fits-all' set of 'how to' suggestions (Zepke 2014: 704). Instead the activities prompt you to think through what is important to you and your partnership learning community. You

are the experts. *Appreciate* is a guide.

### *Appreciate* – Send a thank you card

*Appreciate* also trusts those who use the tool will be both authentic and caring when they undertake the challenges. The tool is only as good as the uses it's put to. Those who use it should commit to being honest with themselves as they undertake the tasks. They should also commit to being open with, and respectful to, anyone else involved with their challenge. Where challenges are being undertaken as part of a collective activity, it would be a good idea to discuss and agree on standards for how you will interact with each other. *Appreciate* asks you to be inclusive and to respect and celebrate difference.

*Appreciate* **challenges** those who will use it. When partnership works well it is transformative for all involved. Cook-Sather and Luz (2014) describe partnership as a threshold concept, recognising it can be troublesome as it transforms. Flourishing requires embracing, or at least managing, the feelings and challenges created by changing how things are done. To do this we must acknowledge where we are finding things difficult, reflect on why, and seek support and

encouragement. We must also be willing to provide those to others. Partnership learning is a chance to be creative, to work differently, and to learn in interesting ways. The cards are an invitation to expand and embed creativity and reward in to your partnership projects. Importantly, *Appreciate* challenges those who use it to ensure that HEIs are spaces of real meaning, understanding, and change.

*Appreciate* can be used to facilitate professional/personal development. It is aligned with the Higher Education Academy's (2011) Professional Standards Framework. It forefronts Professional Values 1-3:

**V1:** Respect individual learners and diverse learning communities.

**V2:** Promote participation in higher education and equality of opportunity for learners.

**V3:** Use evidence-informed approaches and the outcomes from research, scholarship and continuing professional development.

A useful exercise in any HEI using *Appreciate* would be to map the challenges against their graduate attributes, programme-level intended outcomes, and/or institutional values.

### 3. Methods

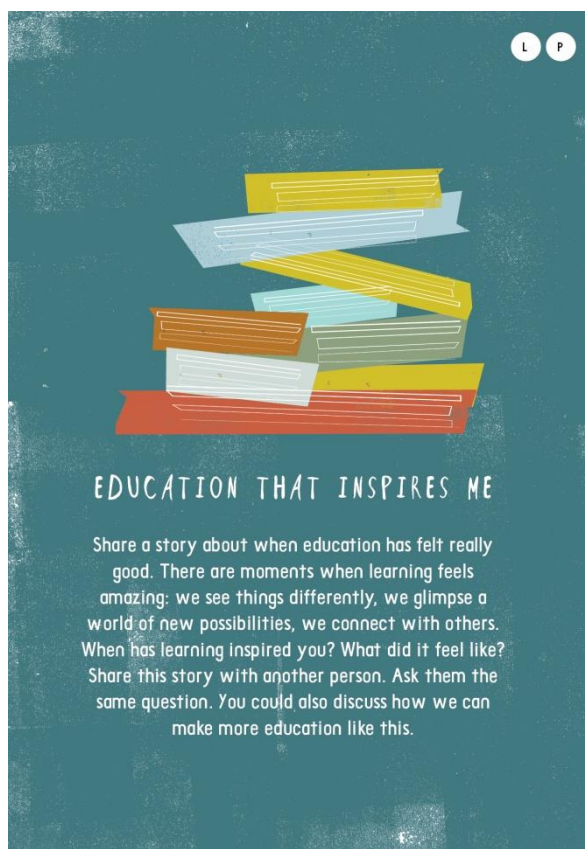
*Appreciate* is evidence-based. It was developed through qualitative research investigating what enables partnership projects in higher education (HE) to work well. Five Universities from across the UK took part in the research: Birmingham City University, University of Edinburgh, Keele University, Manchester Metropolitan University, and University of Exeter. Academics, professional service staff, student union staff, and students took part in semi-structured interviews. The 34 interviewees represented a wide variety of experience and a wealth of expertise. Their partnerships included academics and students, student peer learning, HEIs and student associations as well as partnerships with industry, communities, and other institutions (public and third sector). Some of the partnerships were relatively new, others long running (10+ years). Some of the partnerships were within credit-bearing modules, some were in preparation for such modules, and still others existed as extra-curricular. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and were recorded with consent. The research was reviewed and approved by a University of Exeter's Ethics Committee.

The research used an Appreciative Inquiry framework (Cooperrider and Whitney 2008; Dyer 2015). Appreciative Inquiry is an approach to research which starts with the assumption that a

focus on what is working well can afford significant insights. Certainly, research informants are more likely to be open in interviews if they are asked about positives and these interviews are more likely to be a positive experience for them. In turn, research findings are likely to facilitate their readers to make positive changes by identifying things that can work well and by inspiring them. Interviewees in this research were asked about what enables their partnership to flourish and those involved to share its benefits. Where they identified problems or mistakes they were asked about their strategies for overcoming these.

Appreciative Inquiry is aligned with the values of the *Framework* (Higher Education Academy 2014). Participants are valued for their contribution in an inclusive way. The approach is designed to empower them both, in the interview and afterwards. As qualitative research, the informant is considered to be active in the construction of meaning within the research and the aim of the interviews is a respectful dialogue.

## 4. Themes



*Appreciate* is organised by four themes: Learning, Time & Space, Evidence & Communication, and People. These are themes that emerged during the Appreciative Inquiry interviews. These themes can be used to organise how *Appreciate* is used, for example by allowing users to focus on a particular theme or ensuring they have an opportunity to explore all four.

### 4.1 Learning

*"I became a student with them."* (Academic)

*"There was quite a different dynamic because it felt like there was ... a real sense that we were both trying to figure out the same problem, as opposed to you just presenting your problem to somebody else and them giving you advice, you were both struggling with the same thing."* (Student)



Partnership learning creates the conditions for deep learning of disciplinary knowledge. This is often through creating opportunities for interactions between staff and students, often in the 'real world' or in authentic settings. Disciplinary knowledge was described by one *Appreciate* informant as the 'glue' which held the project together. When partnership learning is successful the learning that takes place is exuberant. It spills over, touches many people, and goes beyond disciplinary knowledge. To make the most of these opportunities, Learning cards set three kinds of challenges. First, they challenge you to think about the nature of learning (who does it and how, and what it feels like to learn). Secondly, additional challenges concern learning in the context of your partnership (how will you learn the things that you will need to for your partnership? How will you record learning and celebrate it?). Finally, it asks a set of questions about HEIs as learning institutions. It is useful to reflect on what this entails, to recognise what it means for you, and to think about how it might motivate you. What opportunities does it offer?

## 4.2 Time and space

*"I wanted to create a classroom outside of the class."* (Academic)

*"I think often times we think that we have to bring students to us but I think going to them is really important... going to a society event to pitch an idea or even just being in the Union and sitting there and seeing people you know. They introduce new people or say 'I've been thinking about this idea, I'd like to talk to you about it', that happens every time I go the Union.*

*Something is created!"* (Professional Services Staff)

A partnership is conditioned by the times and spaces in which it operates. Time & Space cards challenge you to notice things about time and space that you may have become part of what you take for granted. Noticing our taken-for-granted assumption is an important step in creating the conditions for change (Trowler, Fanghanel et al. 2005; 441). The challenges also ask you to experiment with thinking and doing things differently in the spaces you inhabit and to experiment with the differences you can make through these changes.

## 4.3 Evidence and communication

*"We were (all) speaking with the public and you would not have thought that one person is staff, that one is a student. We were (all) doing it because it was our project."* (Student)

*"Reporting is something that's been really important to us from the beginning and a lot of it was because we're also a short-term funded project. It's proving what we do has loads of impacts. So we've tried to build in those processes, instead of doing a project and then evaluating it, we have it all the way through"* (Professional services staff)

Communication is central to creating successful partnership and the values which underpin it. Evidence is one of the things you will need to communicate. Evidence & Communication cards should focus your attention on productive ways to communicate – both with partnership colleagues and with those others your project depends on. They provide an opportunity for you to practise communicating, both as an individual and as a partnership. Finally, the challenges ask you to consider your dissemination strategy. Dissemination should not be something reserved for the end of the project. You will need to engage potential audiences as soon as possible (Hinton, Gannaway et al. 2011).

#### 4.4 People

*"I think I stopped seeing a member of staff as this more distant figure and more, they're a learner as well, kind of thing. So it helped me realise that by all of our lecturers being researchers, they were always on a journey towards learning more and doing more themselves. They weren't just static in their knowledge and we were just trying to catch them up. It was that we were all moving towards knowing more and so in that sense, I think it did change quite a lot: the way I perceive members of staff."* (Student)

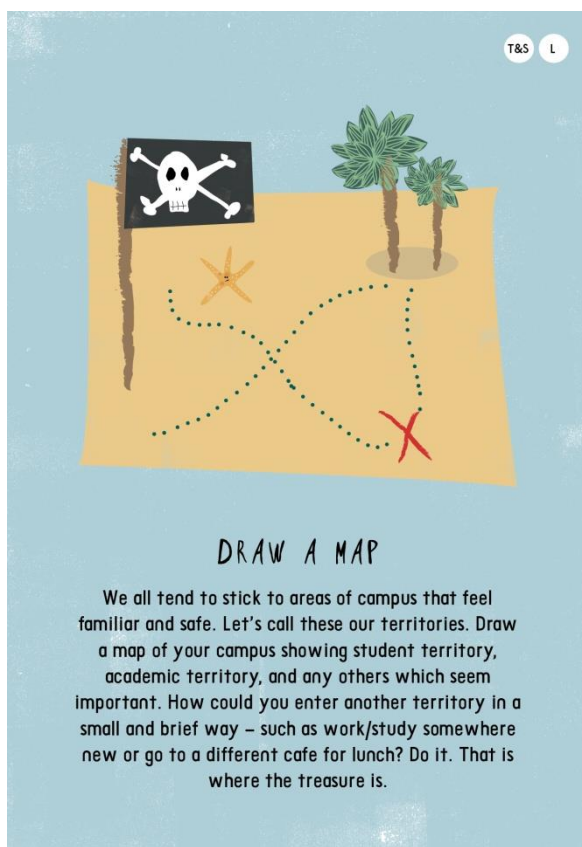
*"University has got a lot of creative people in it. I was on my journey of working with students as partners and I realised I have to surround myself with likeminded people and find them or seek them out from all over the university because I didn't see my role as just stuck in a faculty because if you go on this crazy journey, you become kind of like a campus lecturer."*  
(Academic)

*"We get caught up in people that are against it and we redesign things to make sure they come along. I think I've learned that if you just get the real champions for it and keep pushing forward, then word of mouth and conversations get people more involved. It's about allowing others to tell the story."* (Professional service staff)

Partnership is all about people. People make these things work and make them worthwhile. *Appreciate* allows us to pay attention to the people around us and suggests we connect with them outside the role we occupy within our HEIs (student, academic, etc.). However, People cards also recognise the value of 'time out' and quiet reflection. The idea is not always to be with people but to make the most of the times when we are. *Appreciate* invites us notice the differences and similarities between us and to enjoy both.

## 5. Next steps

The next step is to have a go using *Appreciate*. If you are unsure where to start, you should attempt 'Draw a map'. You do not need to already be working in partnership to undertake this challenge. You will need some pens or pencils and paper and a little bit of time.



*Appreciate – Draw a map*

Once you are using *Appreciate* you will see that each challenge could be extended or re-invented for your own purpose. As an example, you could include other categories on your map. These might include feelings and times. You could ask others to map with you and create a shared map. You could use play dough or papier-mâché (recipes available online). You could find somewhere to display your map(s) and challenge others to enter someone else's territories. You could.....

Enjoy.

## 6. References

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Zepke, N. (2014). Student engagement research in higher education: Questioning an academic orthodoxy. *Teaching in Higher Education* 19(6): 697-708.

# Contact us

+44 (0)1904 717500 enquiries@heacademy.ac.uk  
Innovation Way, York Science Park, Heslington, York, YO10 5BR  
Twitter: @HEAcademy www.heacademy.ac.uk

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# INSTRUCTIONS

The cards are a tool for developing or enhancing partnership as set out in the *Framework for partnership in learning and teaching in higher education* (HEA, 2014). The idea is simple. Each card sets out a challenge. Choose a card and do the challenge.

## INDIVIDUALLY OR COLLECTIVELY?

The cards are designed to be used by individuals or groups. Used by an individual the cards should support reflective practice. Used collectively they could be used to facilitate the design, development, or review of a project. They could be used to facilitate the formation of a project team, as a tool for training, to facilitate appreciative conversations, or to research your project.

### DELIBERATELY OR RANDOMLY?

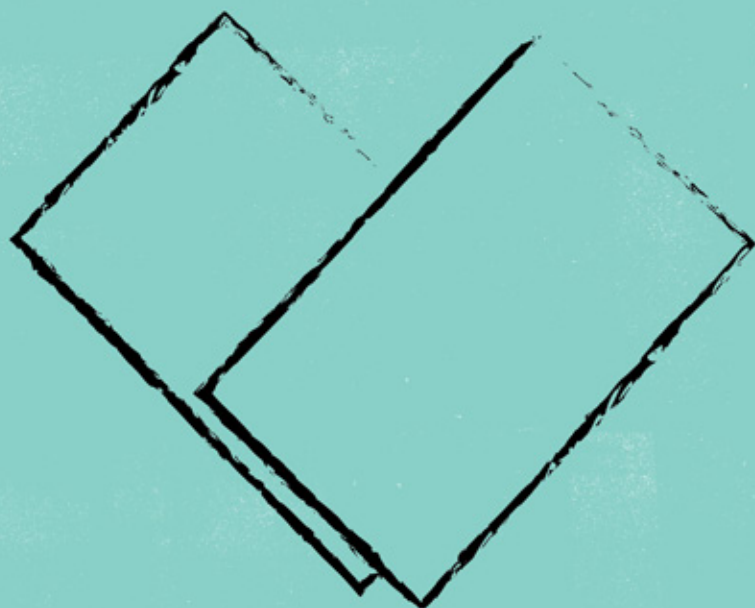
The cards are organised by theme: time & space, learning, evidence & communication, and people. You may want select particular cards or themes because they seem important. Alternatively you could 'pick a card, any card'.

### EPHEMERAL OR RECORDED?

The cards should be fun and productive to use. As with all good play we hope you will get lost in these activities. However, we do recommend you record your insights in some way. Everyone processes things differently. For some people an emphasis on writing can be obstructive so we suggest thinking creatively. You may choose other ways of capturing what happens, such as drawing, audio or film.







# APPRECIATE

Cards to support appreciative  
partnership learning



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T&S L



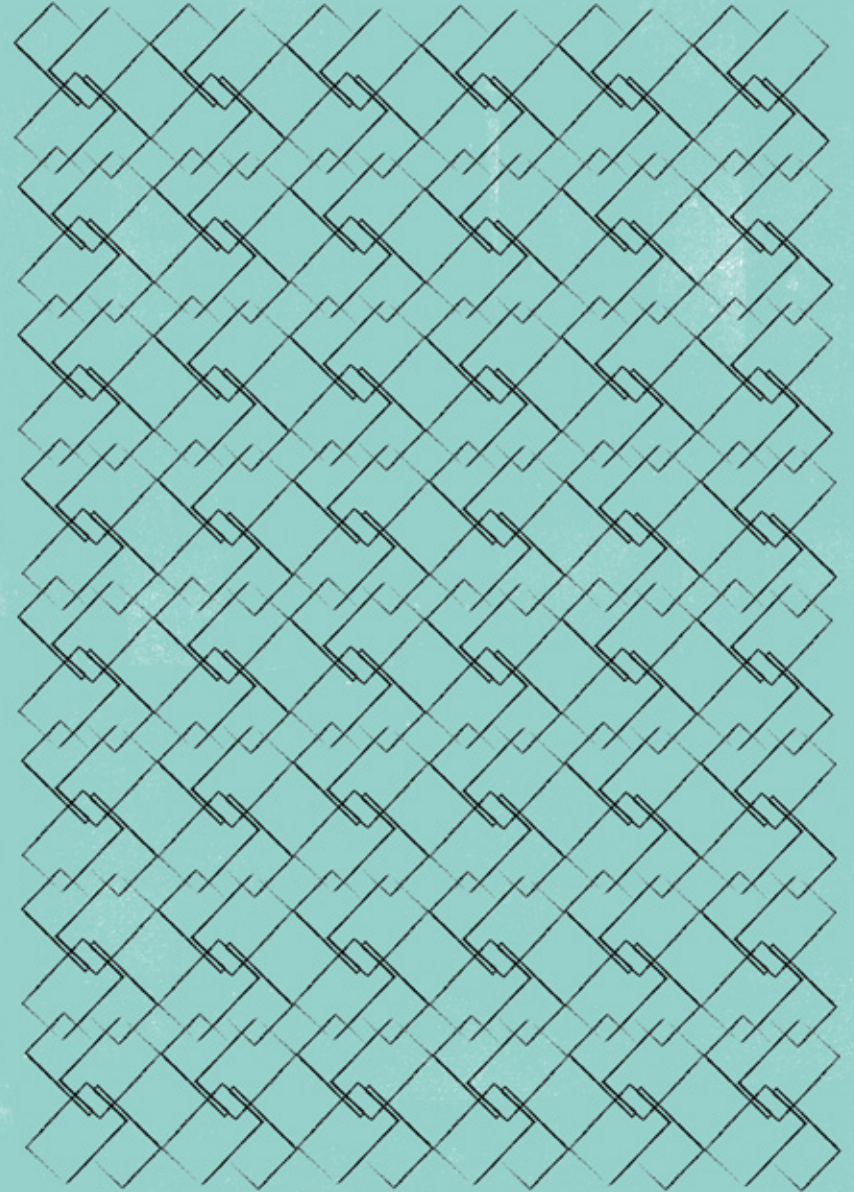
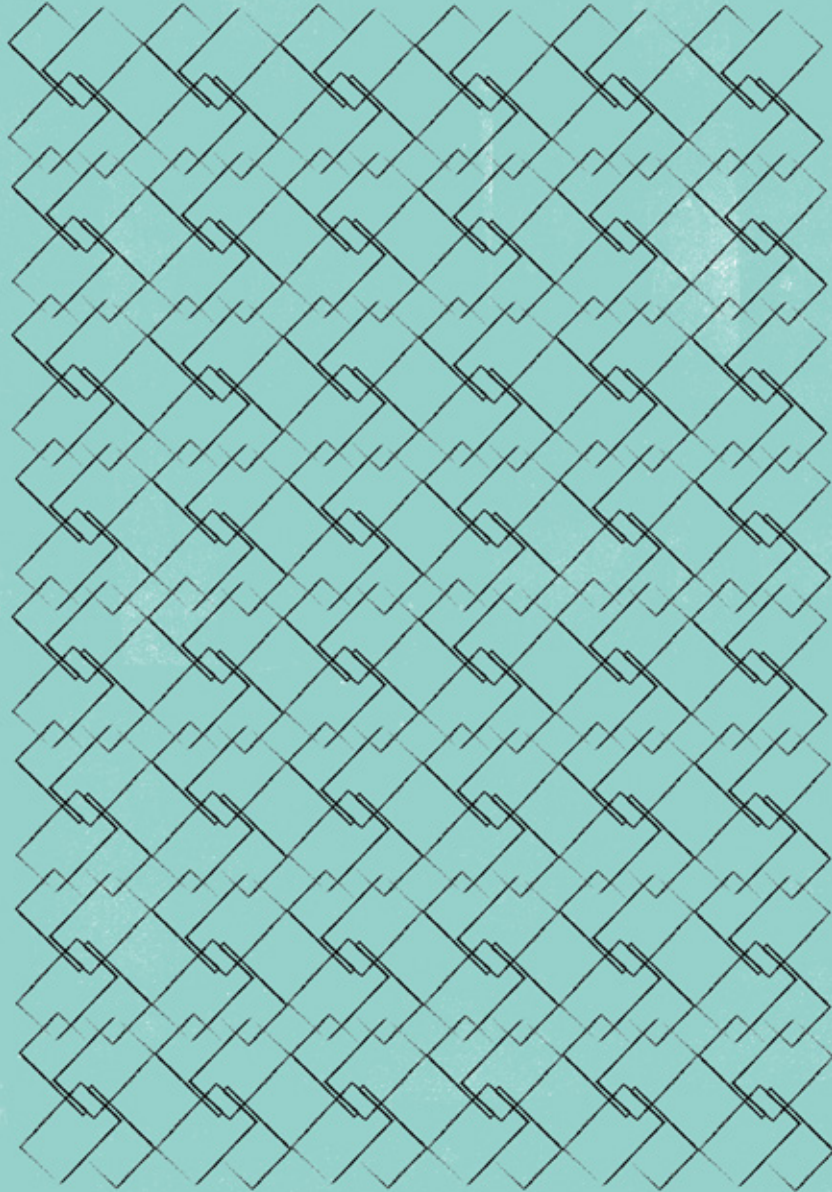
## DRAW A MAP

We all tend to stick to areas of campus that feel familiar and safe. Let's call these our territories. Draw a map of your campus showing student territory, academic territory, and any others which seem important. How could you enter another territory in a small and brief way – such as work/study somewhere new or go to a different cafe for lunch? Do it. That is where the treasure is.

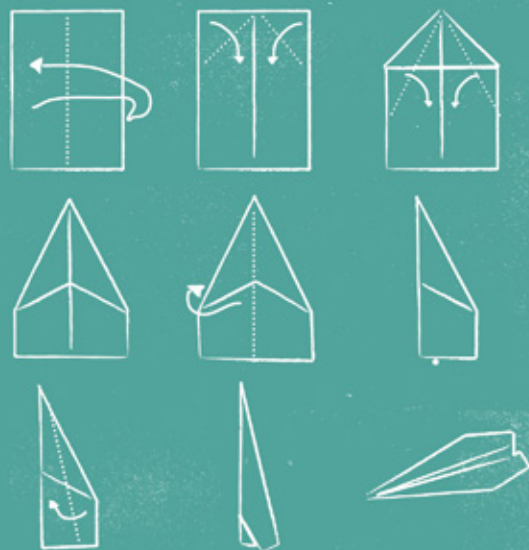


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## GIVE IT WINGS

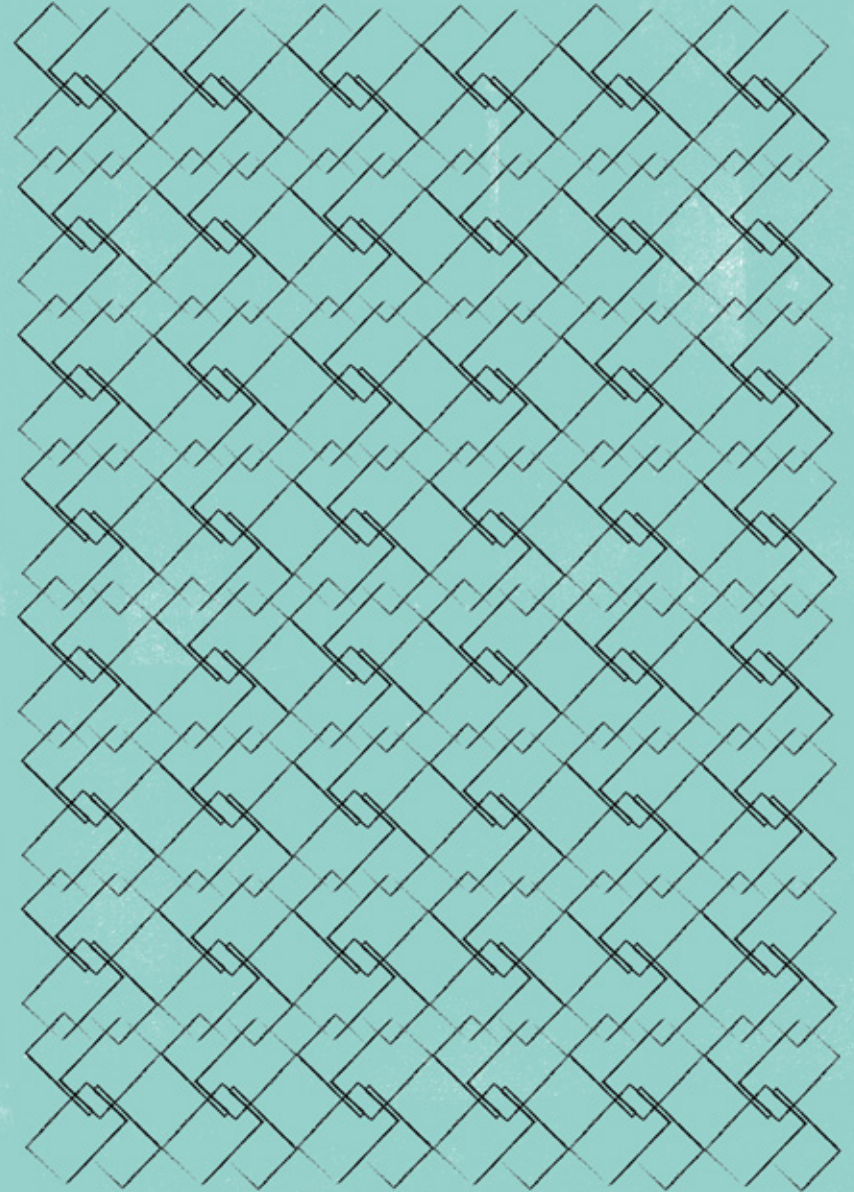
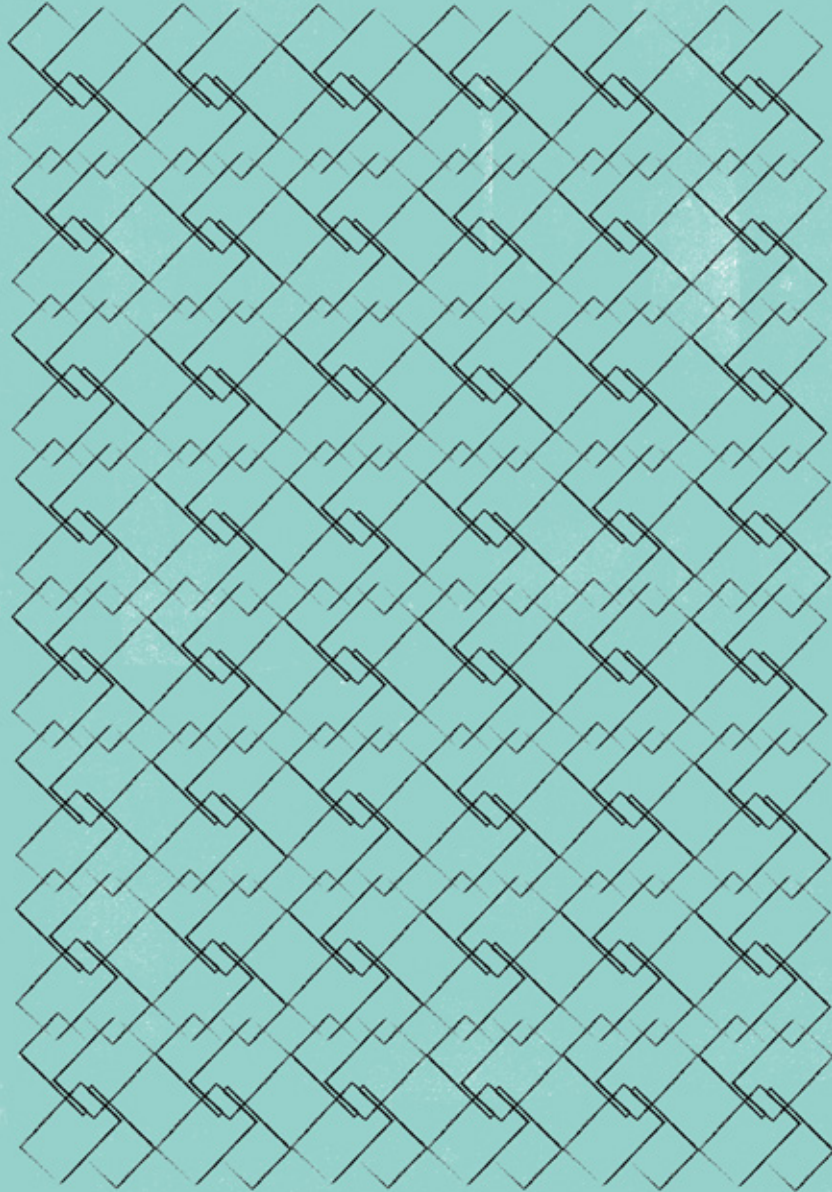
Take an A4 piece of paper. Write a title: 'Making our partnership sustainable'. Think about people, funding, policy and others' agendas. Write a list of ideas – include the ones that seem crazy too. Using the instructions above, make your list into an aeroplane. How well does it fly? Ask someone for design advice – they may want to comment on the plane or the ideas. Can others make a plane that flies further?



## WRITE A POSTCARD

Imagine the perfect place for your partnership community to meet. What does it look like? What is the weather like? What furniture do you have? What technology? Are there snacks? Write a 'wish you were here' postcard: who are you going to send it to and why? Now do one thing to make the space you have more like the perfect space you have imagined.





T&S



## THE RHYTHM OF LIFE

If your past year was a tune what would the percussion sound like? Drum the rhythm of your past and coming year (or whatever timeframe makes most sense) on a table. Do you need to add other noises or sound effects to communicate your year? Record it.

E&C

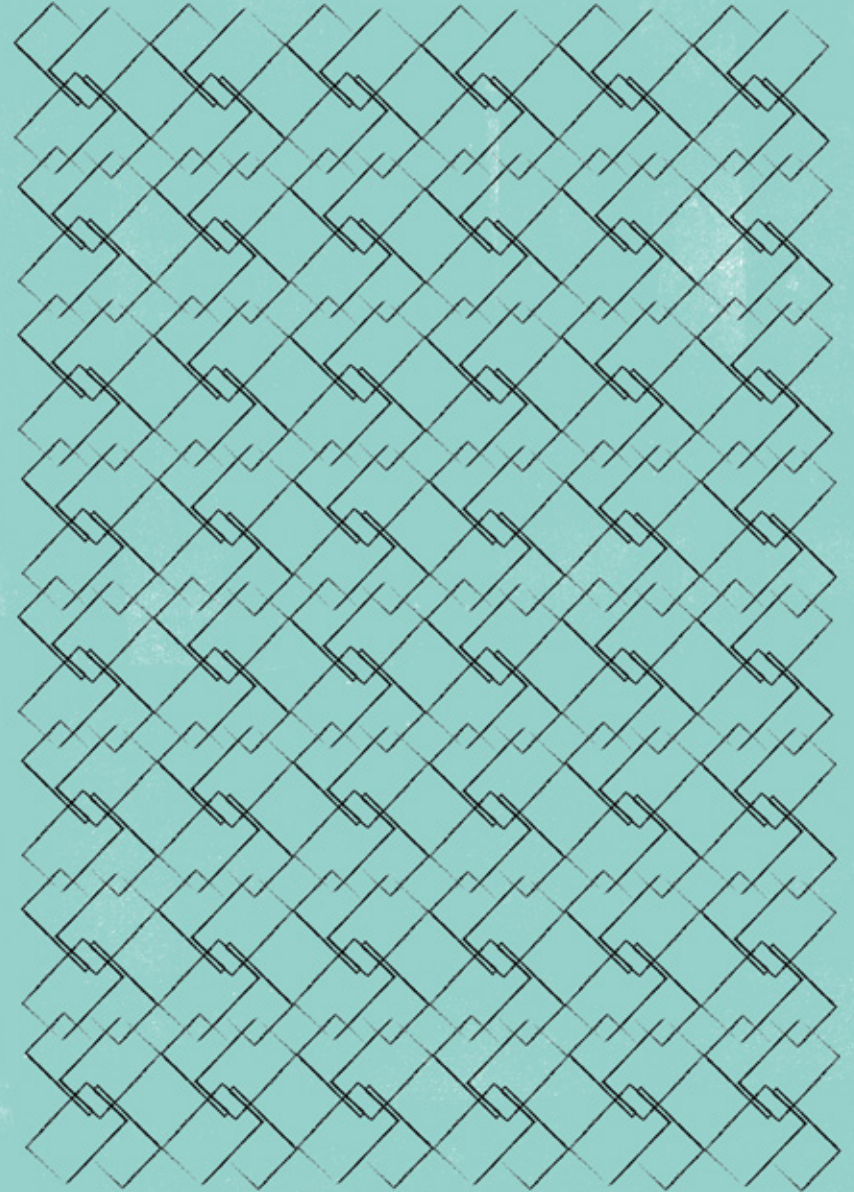
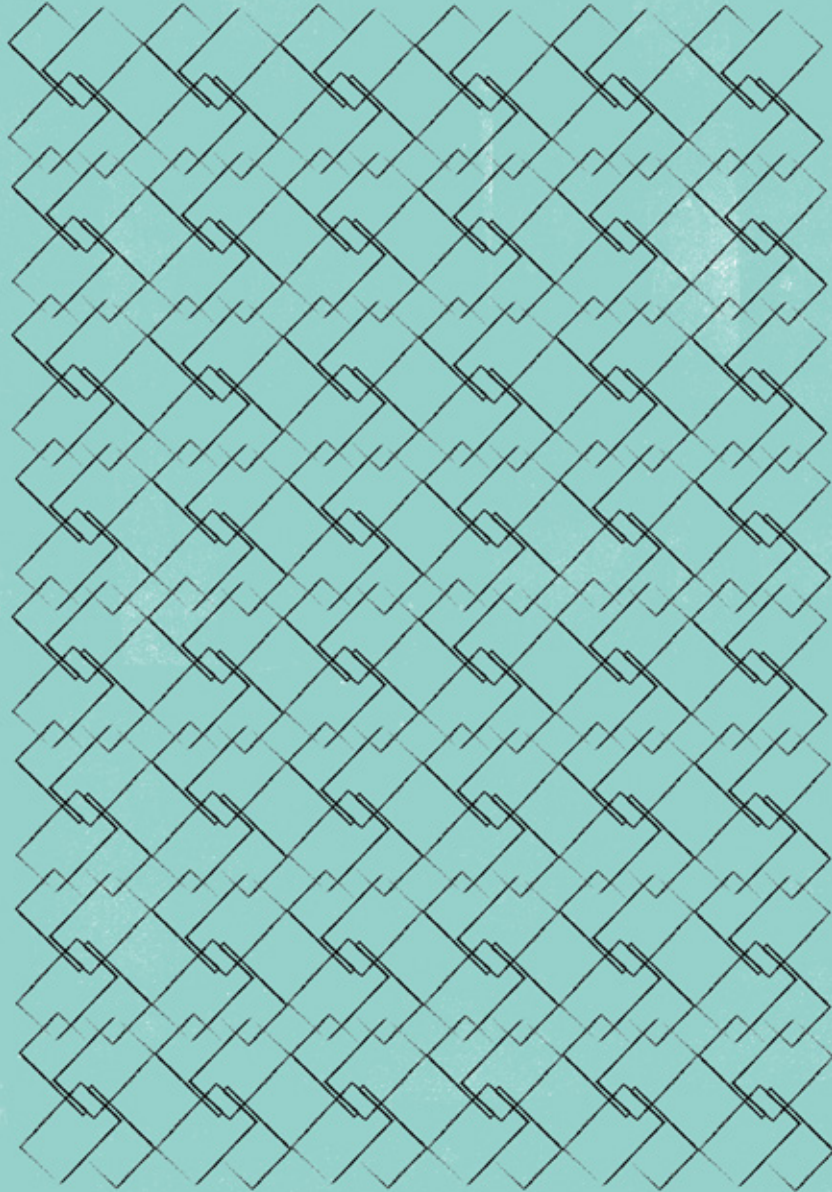


## YOUR AUDIENCE

Who needs to know about all the great things your partnership is doing? Your audiences might include education committees, academic colleagues, your student association, potential employers, promotion panels, education researchers, or your Vice-Chancellor.

Different audiences are persuaded by different evidence. Choose one person in one of your audiences. Do you know what will make him/her listen? (It is likely that you will have some ideas but that you will also need to investigate more.) How can you collect the right evidence and how make sure your audience sees it?







## EDUCATION THAT INSPIRES ME

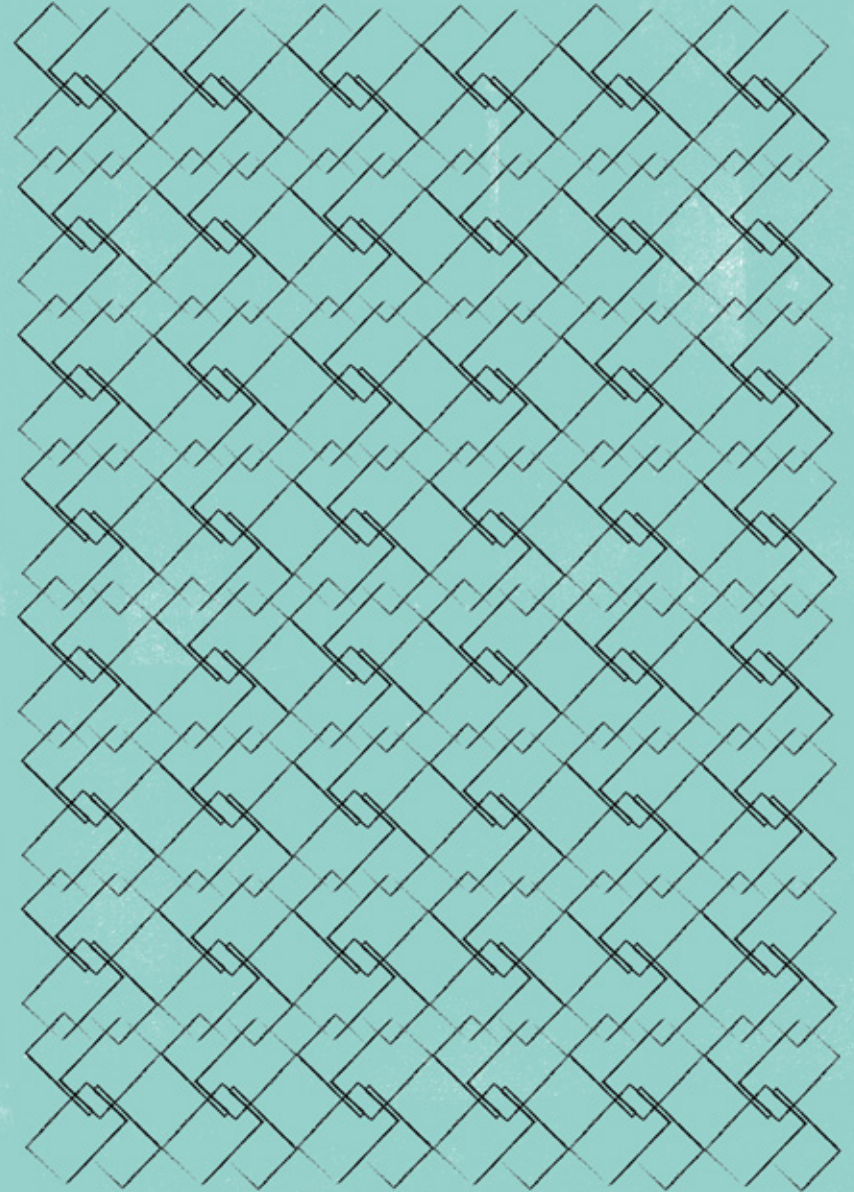
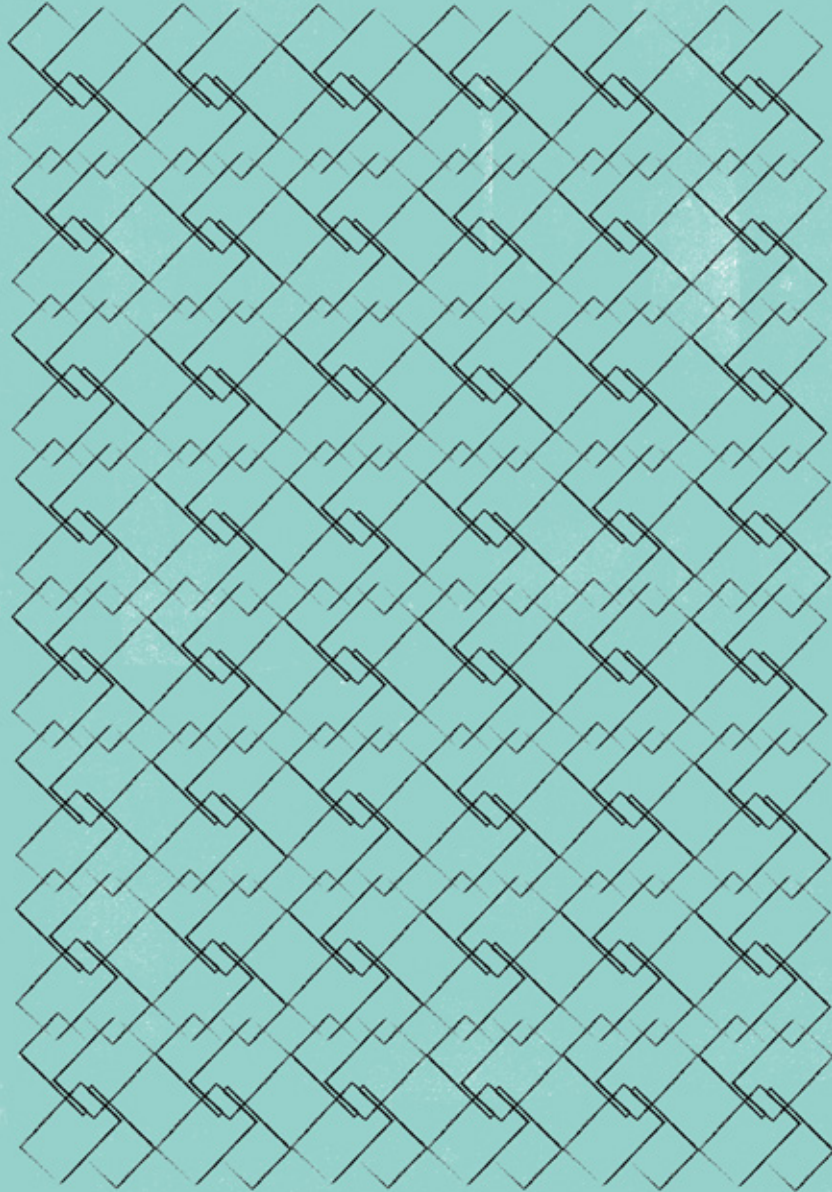
Share a story about when education has felt really good. There are moments when learning feels amazing: we see things differently, we glimpse a world of new possibilities, we connect with others. When has learning inspired you? What did it feel like? Share this story with another person. Ask them the same question. You could also discuss how we can make more education like this.



## SEND A THANK YOU CARD

It's easy not to say thank you; to forget to or choose not to because it feels odd. It's lovely though when someone says thanks you. It makes us feel our work has been noticed, that it matters, and it inspires us to do more. In the last couple of weeks, when has someone said or done something that has made a difference to you? Write that someone a note to say thank you. Tell them why it mattered.









## BOTTLE IT

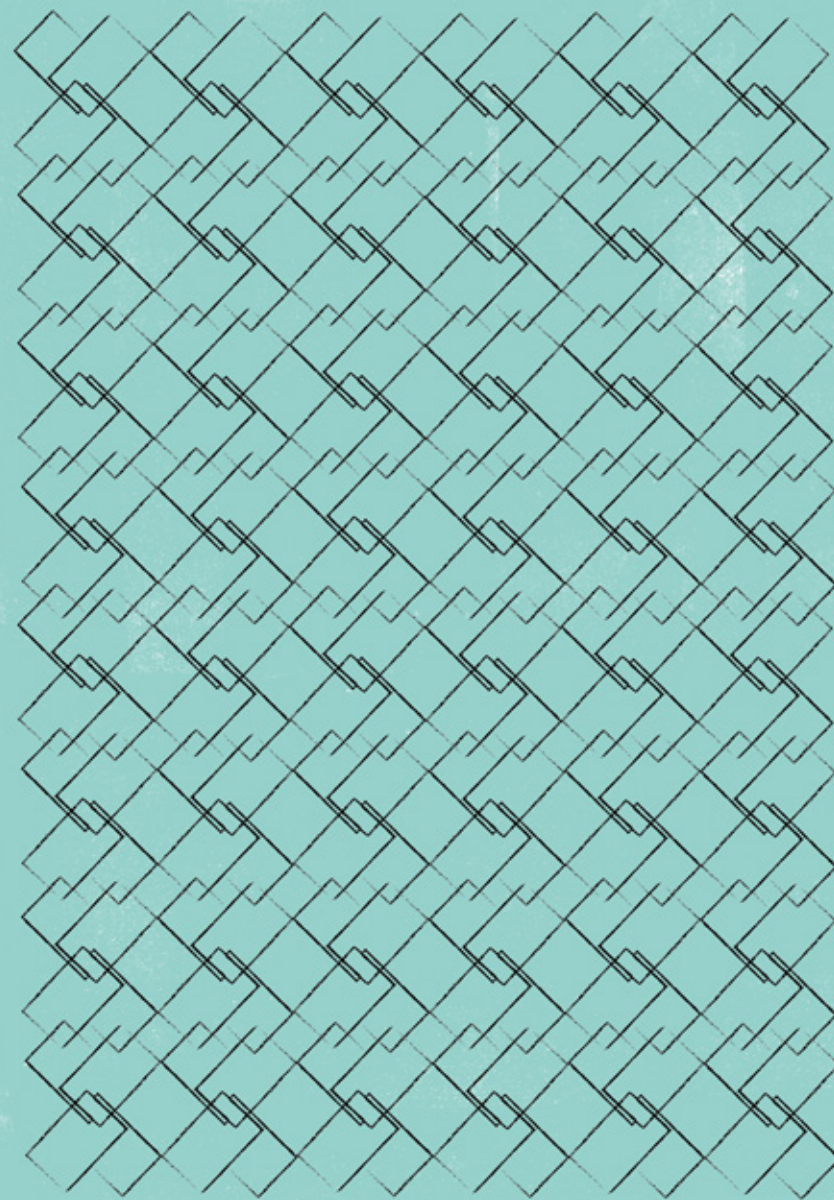
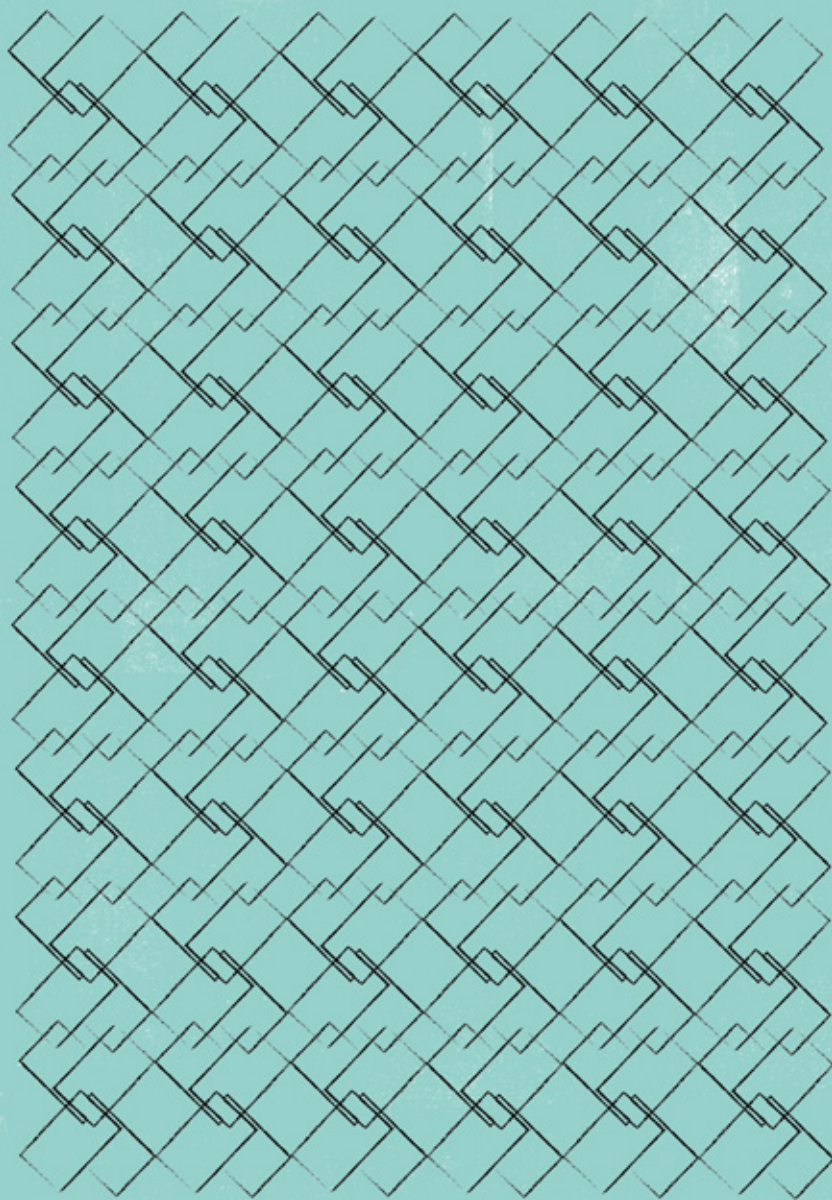
What makes being involved in partnership important to you? Think of things that feel exciting and energising.

It is great, isn't it? (Think why it works and how to create more of that.) How can you record what makes partnership worthwhile for you? This is about celebrating and remembering the great bits. It is about having a store of nourishment from your harvest. How can your harvest best be preserved?



## SPELL IT OUT

To try to save time we can end up talking in TLAs (three letter abbreviations) and other jargon. Such words and phrases can have two negative effects. They can exclude outsiders from those conversations. They can also hide things from those who use them, by keeping in play assumptions that may not have been examined for a while. To address this, write a glossary for your partnership in simple, straightforward language. Start with abbreviations but don't stop there.







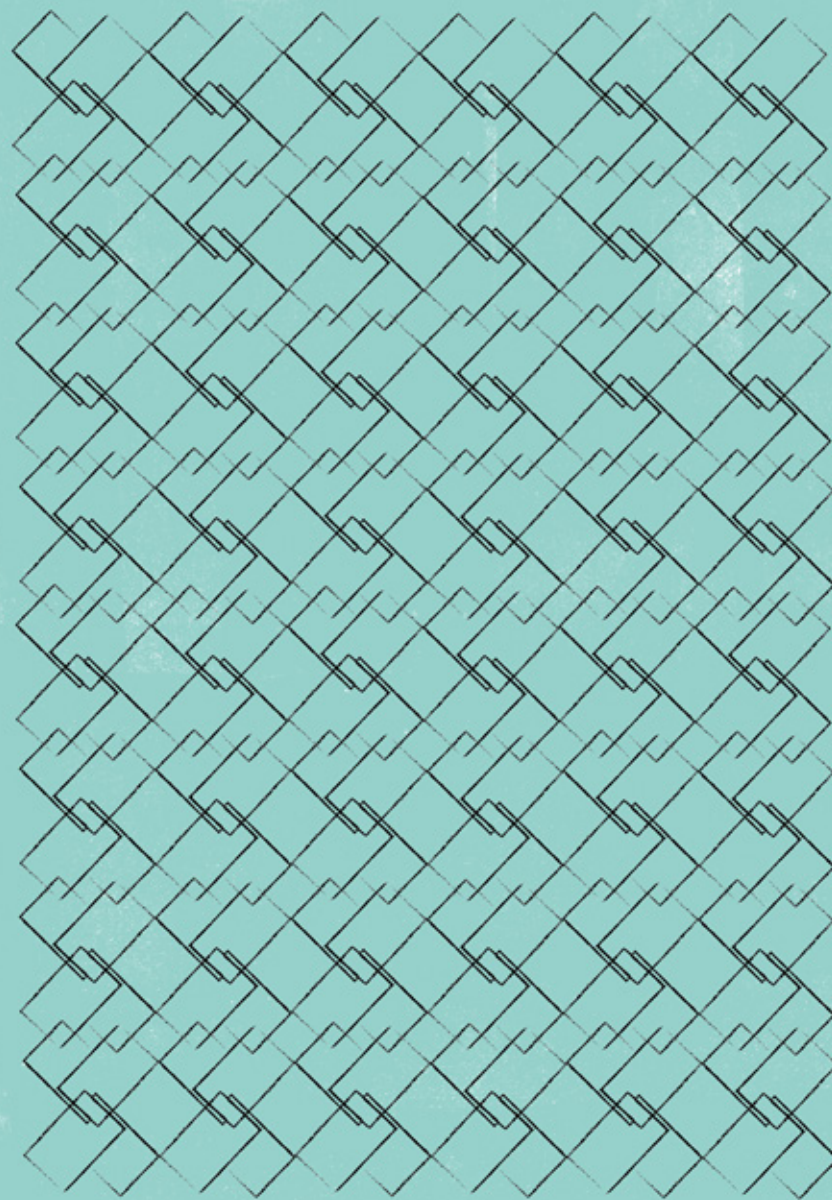
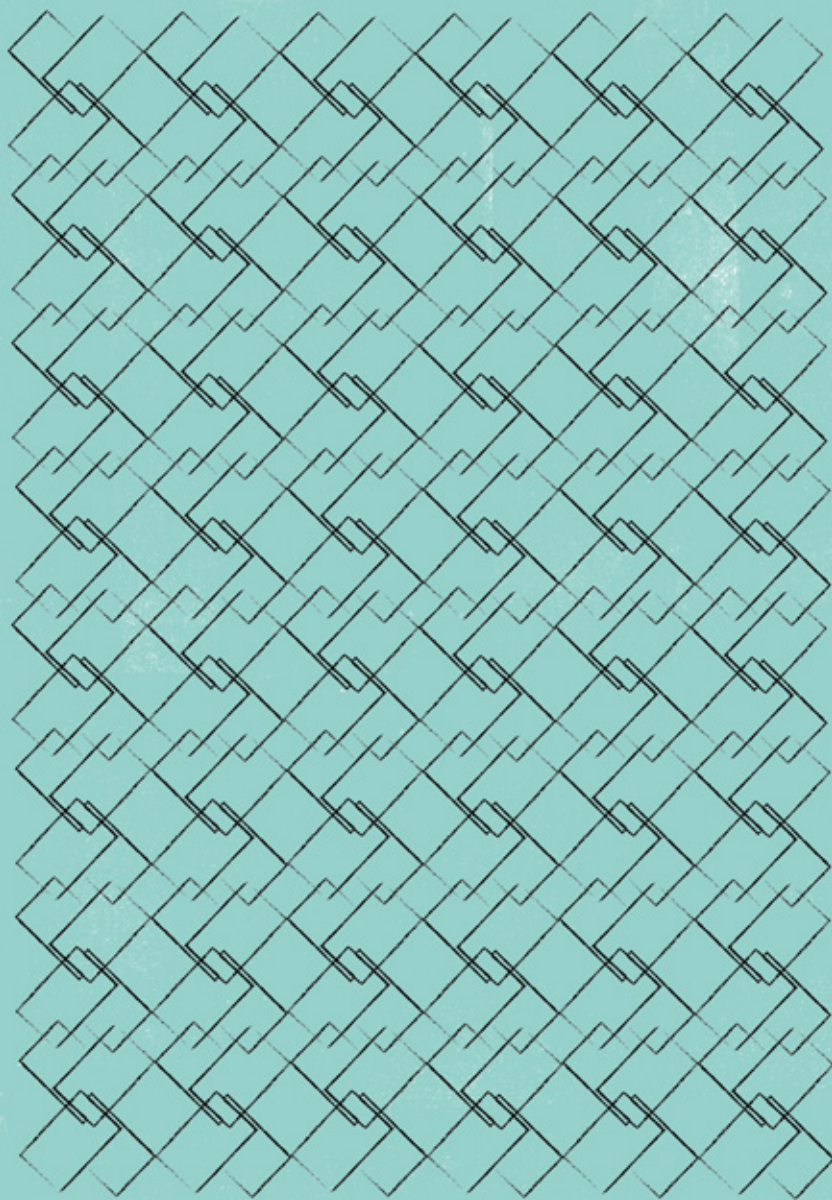
### RULES OF THE GAME

Imagine your partnership is a game. What game is it? Who are the different players and what are the rules of the game? Plan it. Design it. Play it.



### KEEP IN TOUCH

Often partnership happens outside core working routines and relationships. While this can be fun and productive it may mean you don't bump into people in shared space or scheduled activities. We can all shy away from scheduling meetings. It is easy to imagine that everyone knows what everyone is doing, what they should be doing, shares your experiences and worries. Don't imagine. How will you find out?





P

E&amp;C



## INVITE

It is likely that the people who initially get involved in your partnership are already very engaged. We love these 'usual suspects'. How can their role be extended to include inviting others in to the partnership? Can you turn usual suspects into involvers?

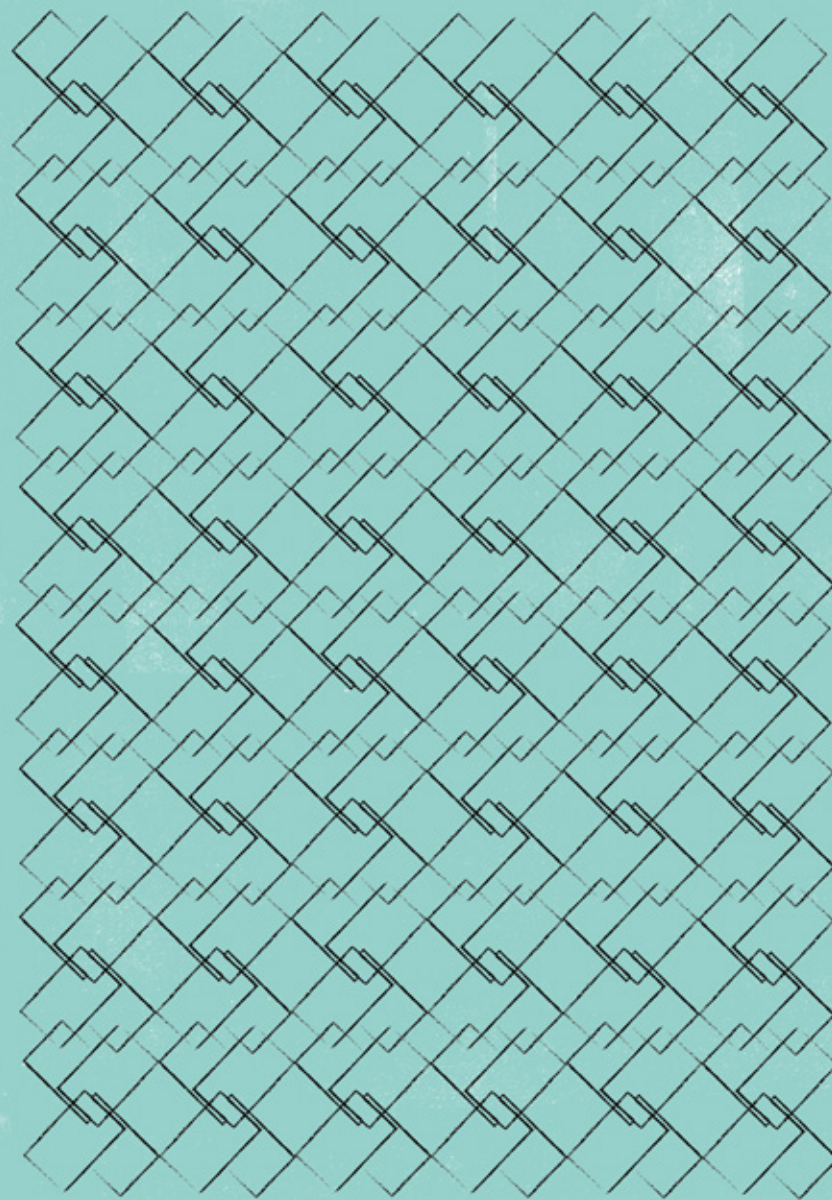
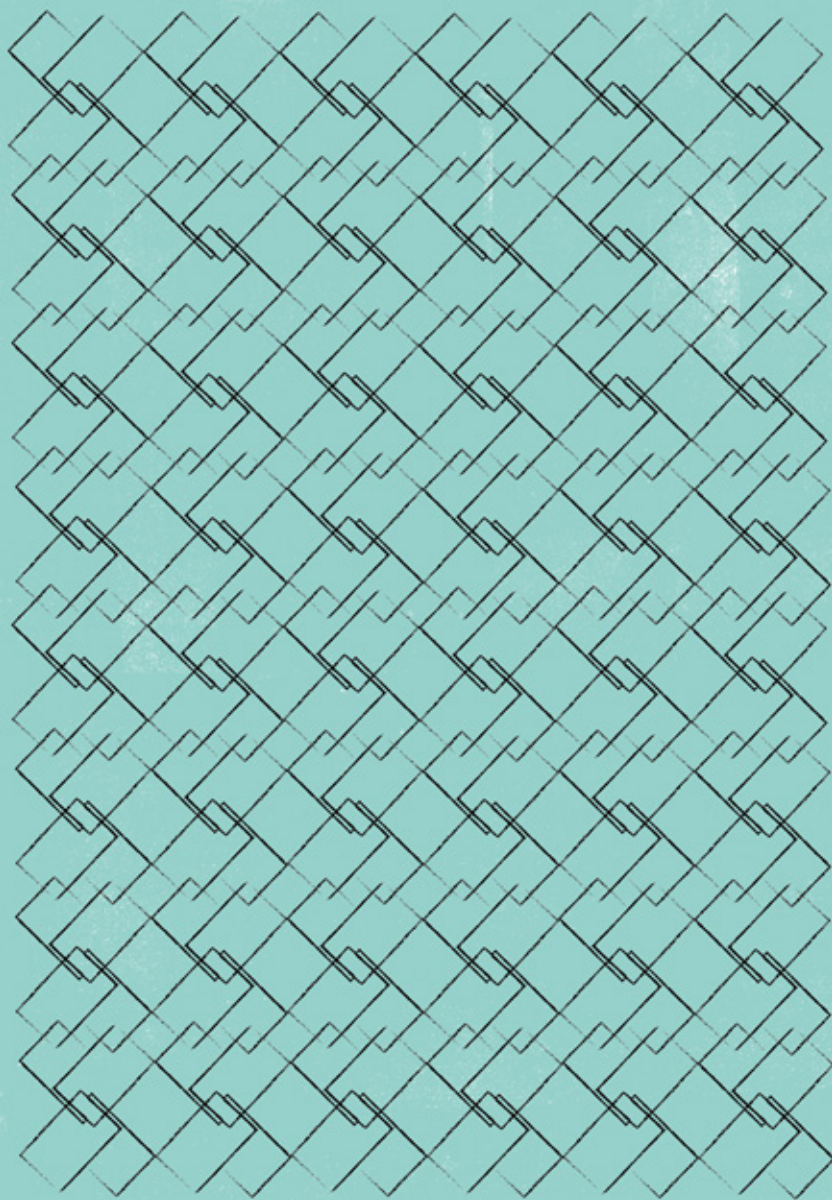
T&amp;S



## PLANT A SEED

Plant a seed....no wait, it might not be the right time of year, the right seed, the right place. What makes this the 'right time of year' for your partnership? What makes it the right place? You probably have some choice in planting this seed. Think about the perfect growing conditions, but don't let this perfection obscure conditions that would be good enough.





## JOIN THE DOTS

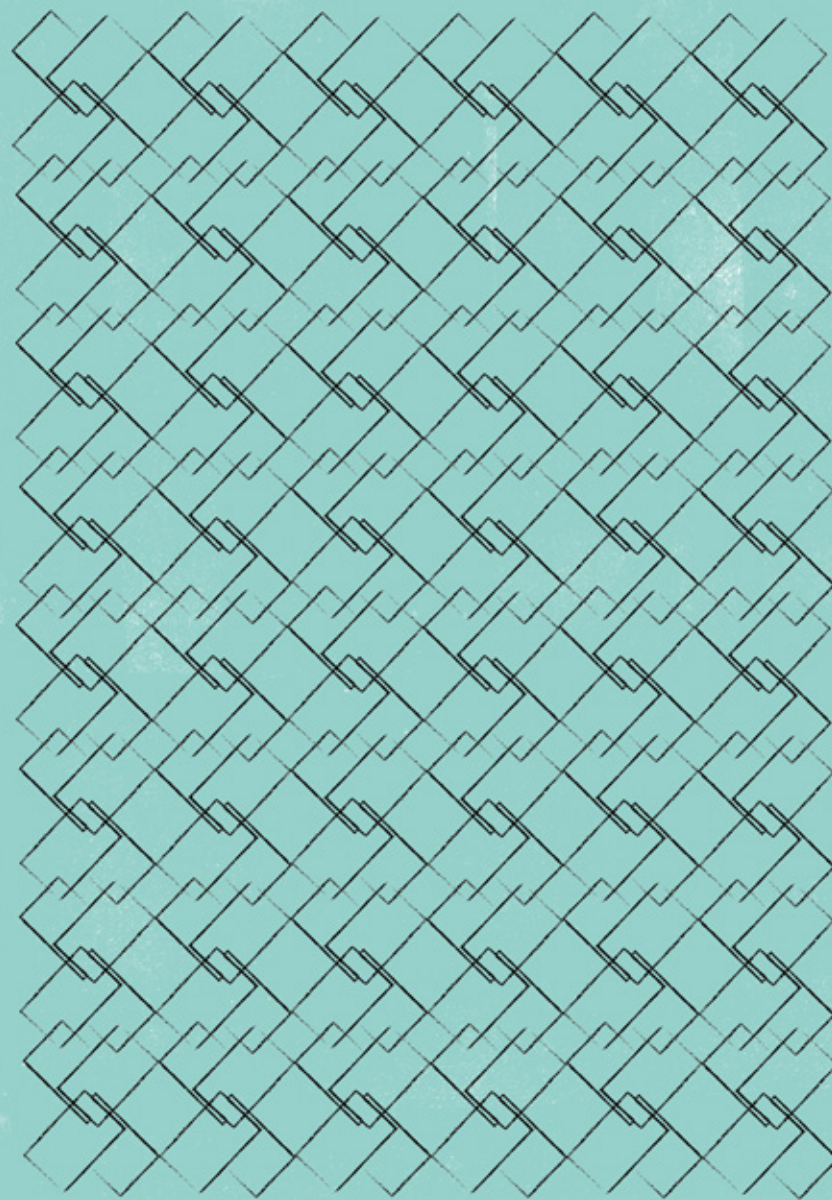
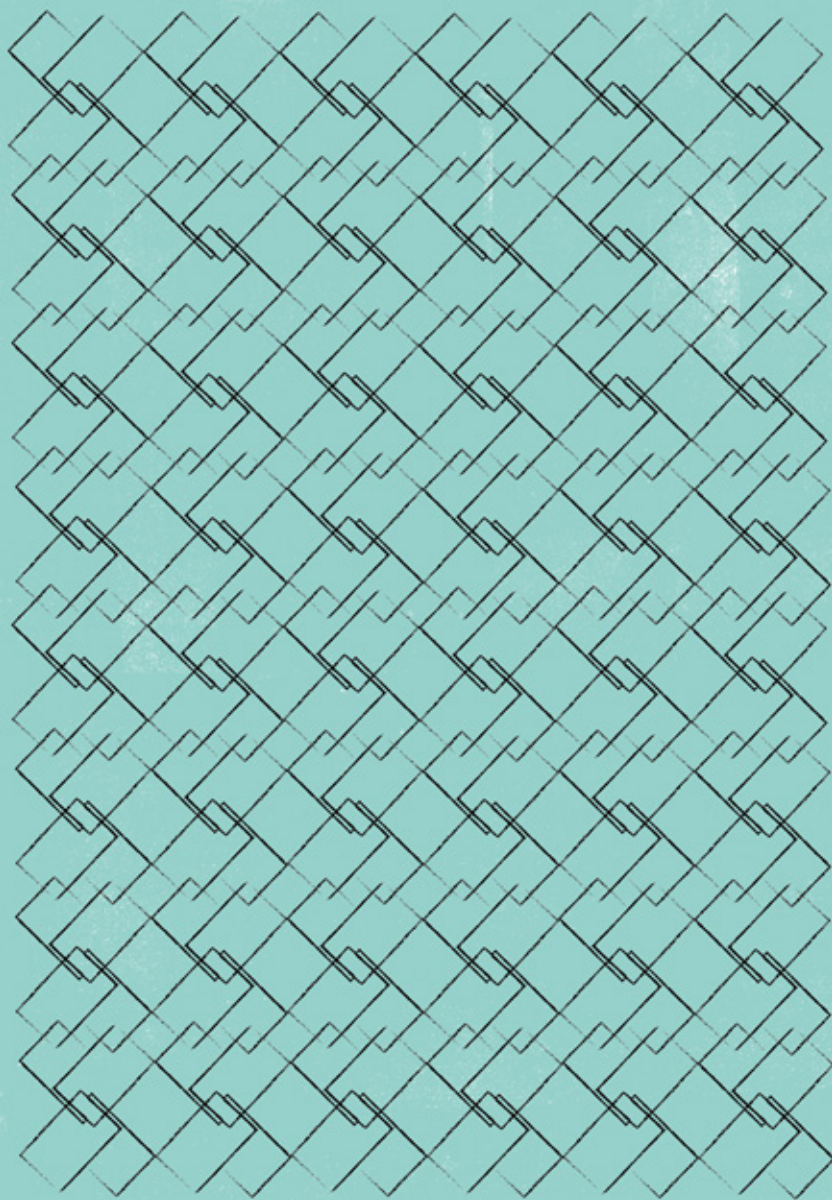
You need the support of like-minded people. Take a piece of paper and draw some dots. Each one of those dots is a like-minded person. Where are they and how can you connect them? Where might you find some more? (You can also do this activity with a notice board, drawing pins, and thread.)



## WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

Tying reef knots. Debugging computers. Making biscuits. Each of us have skills that make life easier and more enjoyable. Ask someone to do a skills share – you each learn a skill from the other. You will need to make sure it is something you want to learn. Observe, have a go with guidance, then try on your own. How can you be a better teacher? How can you be a better learner?





L E&C



## TAKE A WALK

Have a wander around your university. Think of a route that connects you to what is important about University. Take someone else on that walk and share why it is important.

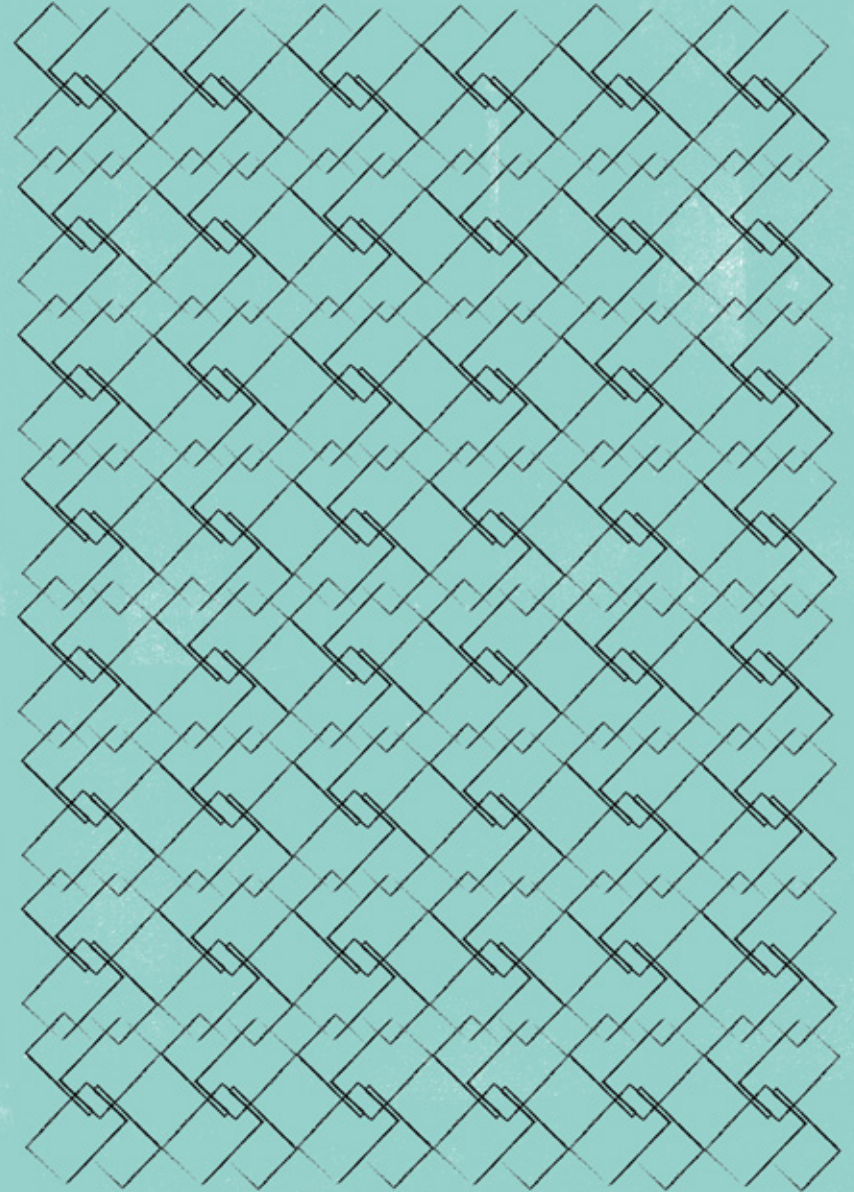
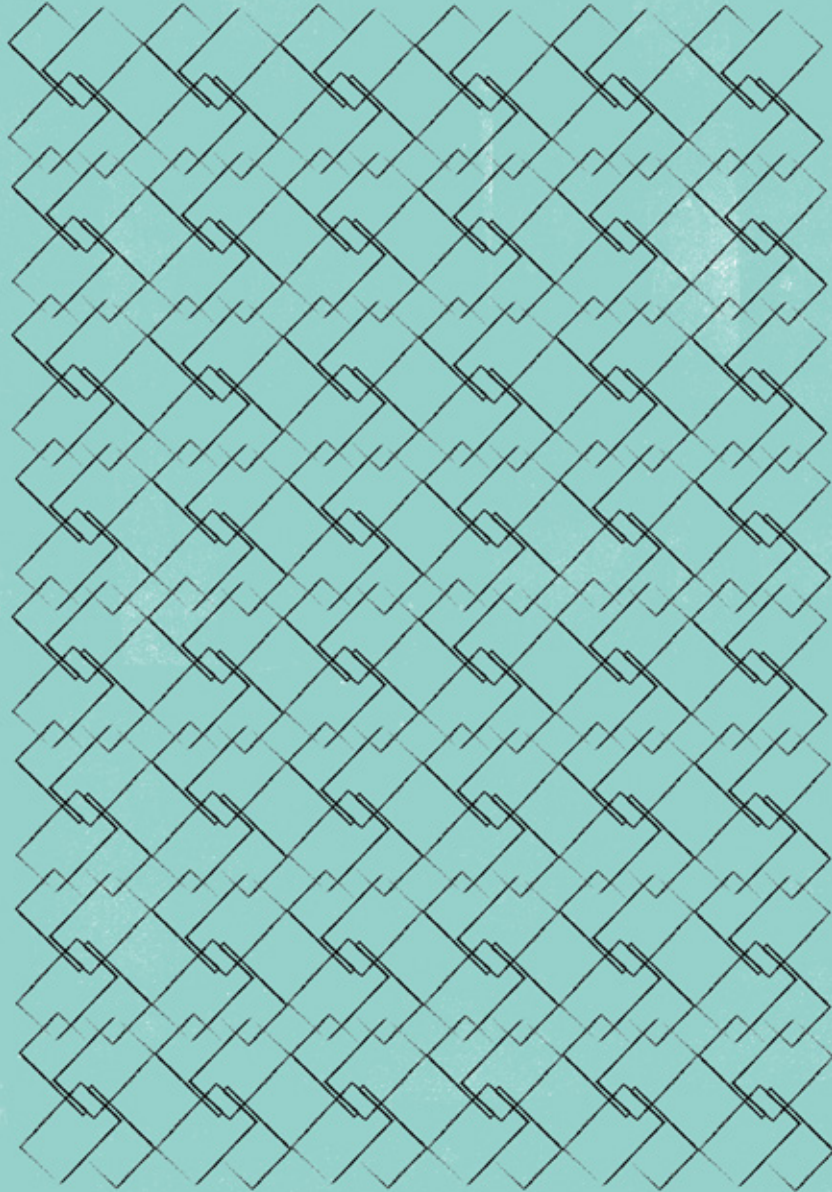
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## FLOWER

Write down a time you have made a mistake. Draw a circle round it. This is the centre of your flower. Now surround it with petals. Write something positive that came from your mistake on each petal. Add some colour. Stick the picture on your fridge or the wall above your desk.





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## STRIKE A POSE

Does the idea of taking responsibility fill you with excitement or dread? Adopt a posture that represents what responsibility means to you. What would energising responsibility look like? Do one thing today that makes you feel like that.

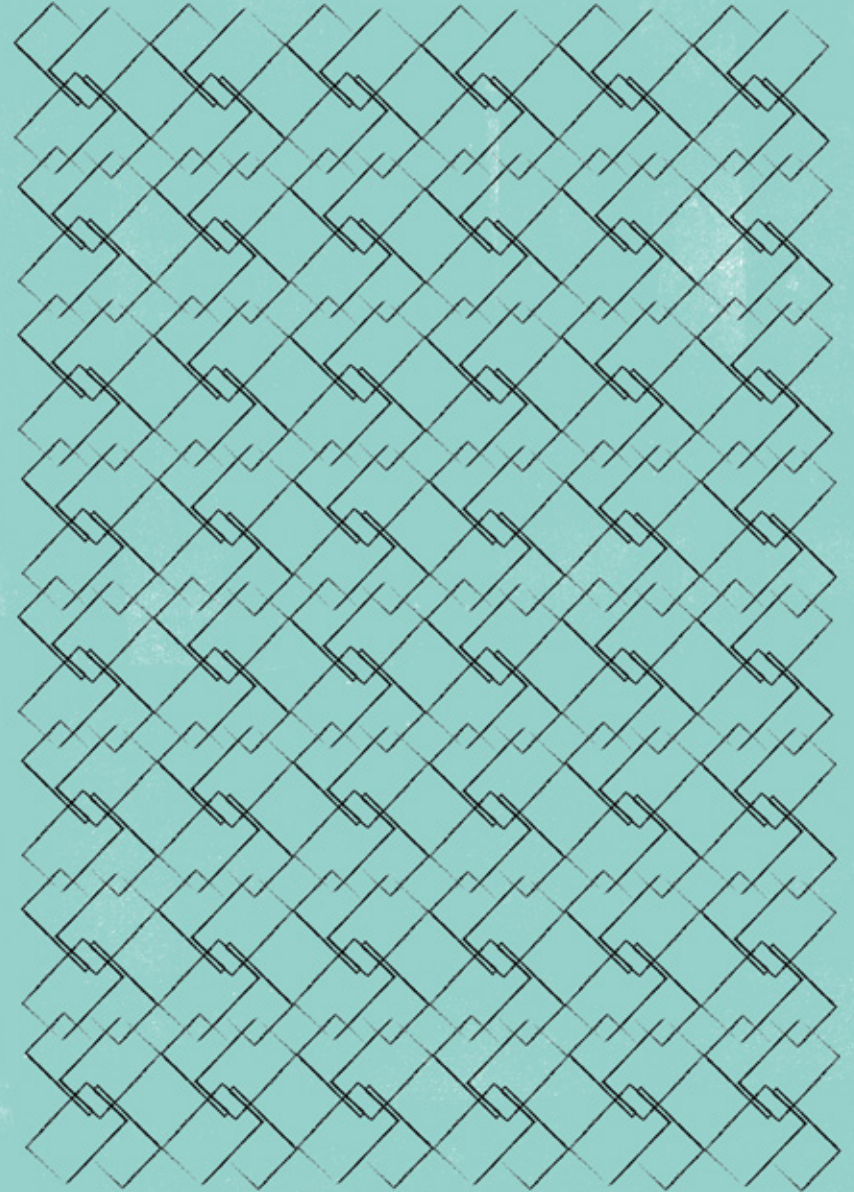
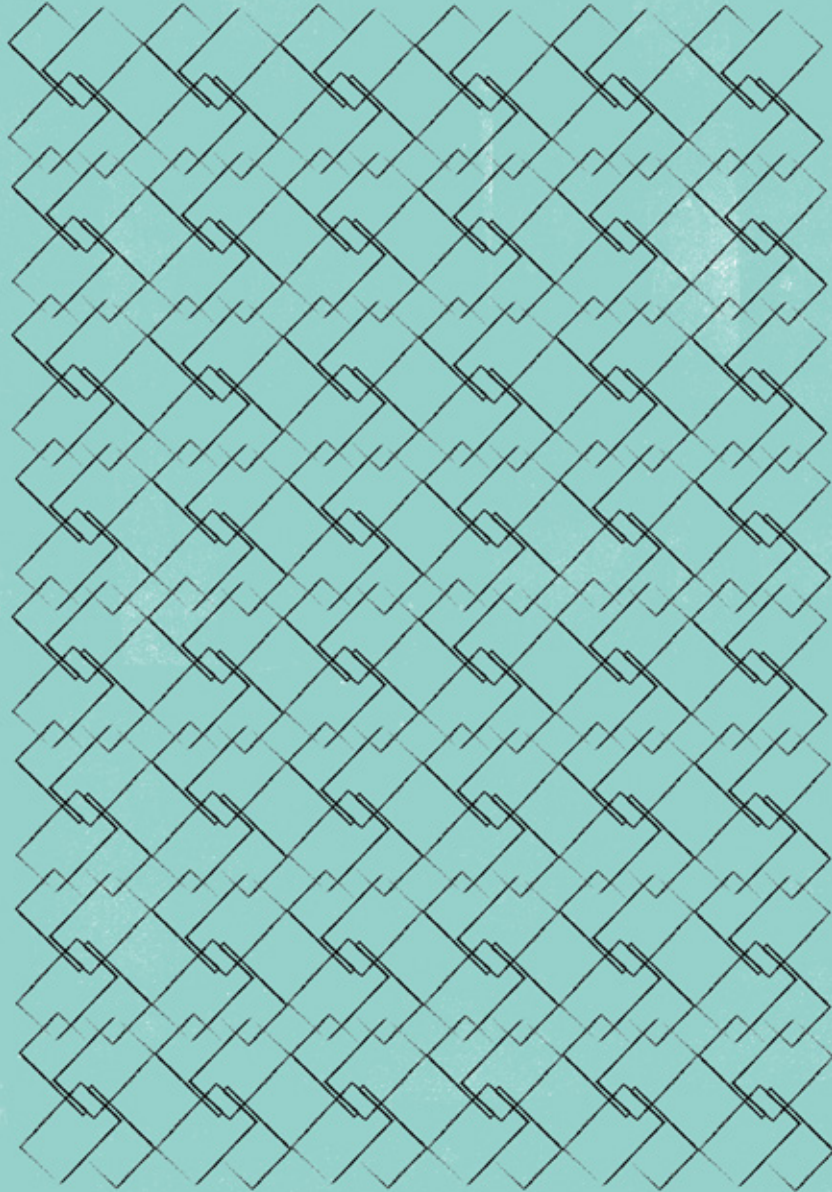
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## ASK FOR ADVICE

Ask someone for their advice. It doesn't matter if you don't think you need it. While you are at it ask another person too. Ask away...and don't reply by telling them why their advice won't work. Instead say thank you and think it over.





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## HOUSE OF CARDS

Building a house of cards takes determination, persistence, and a steady hand. Build an Appreciate house of cards.

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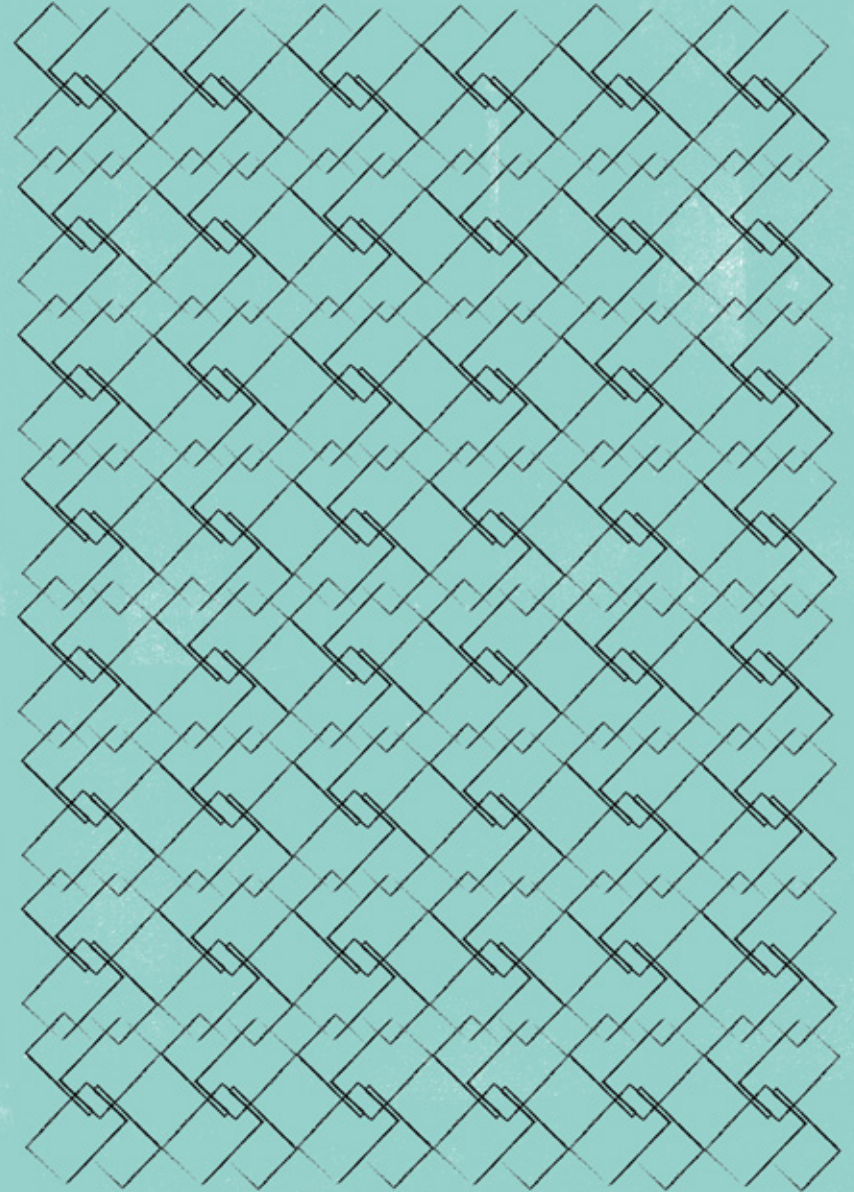
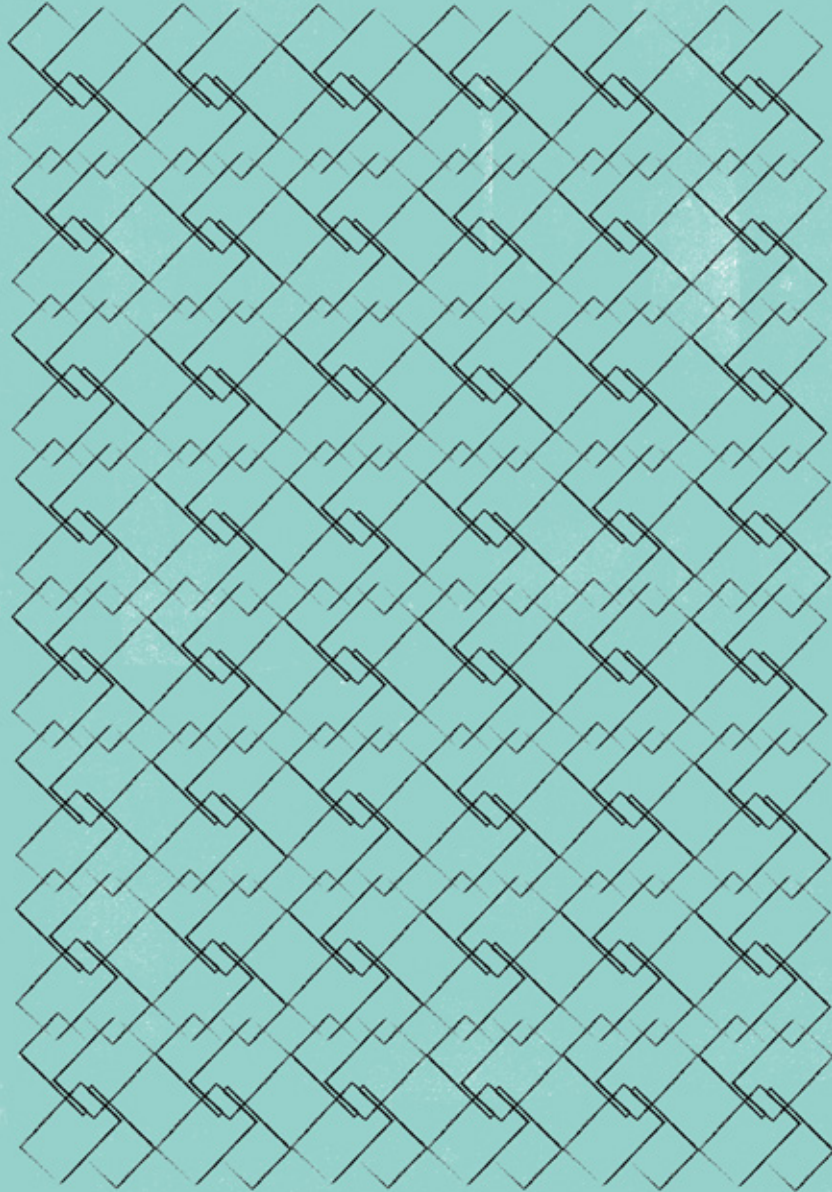
T&amp;S



## LISTEN

Go somewhere where people are learning. Listen – really listen. What does learning sound like? (You can watch instead if this makes more sense to you.) Is it different in different places?







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## CHERRY ON THE CAKE

What are you trying to achieve in your partnership?  
What is the cake and what the icing and the cherry?  
What is your recipe for making it all happen?

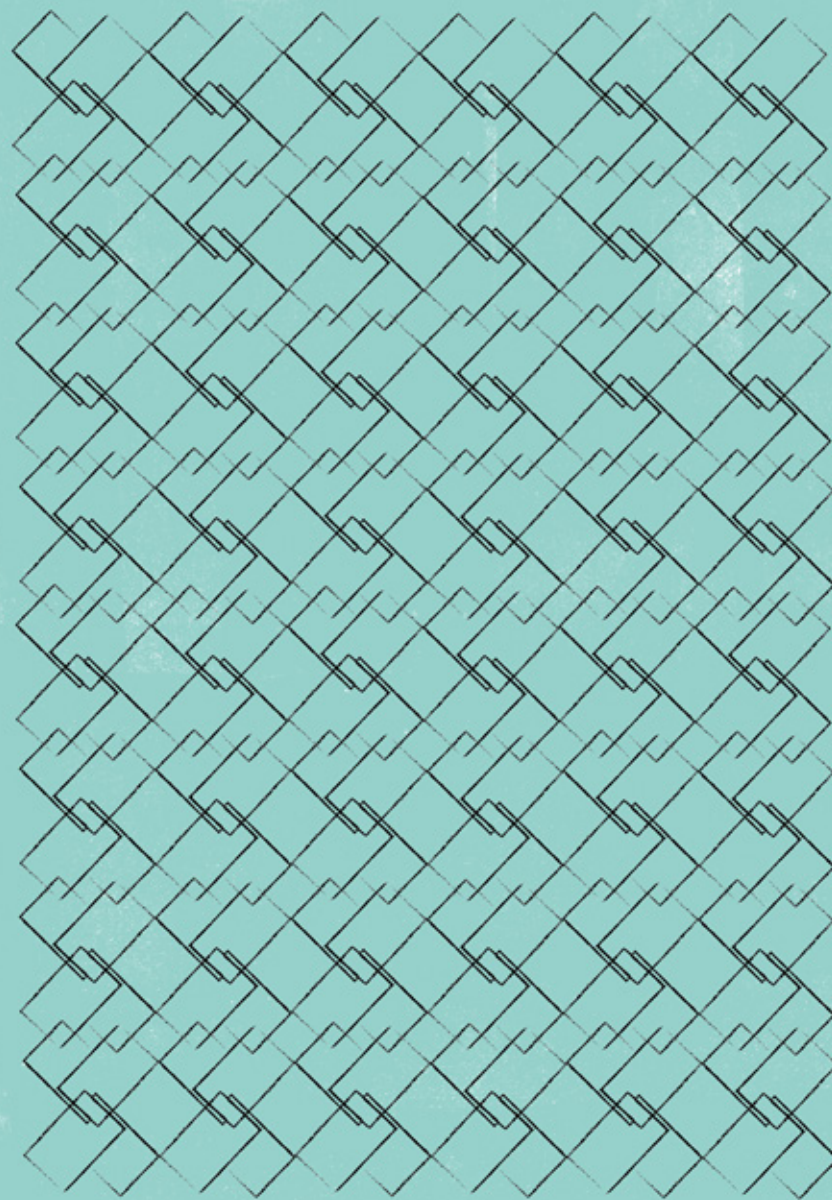
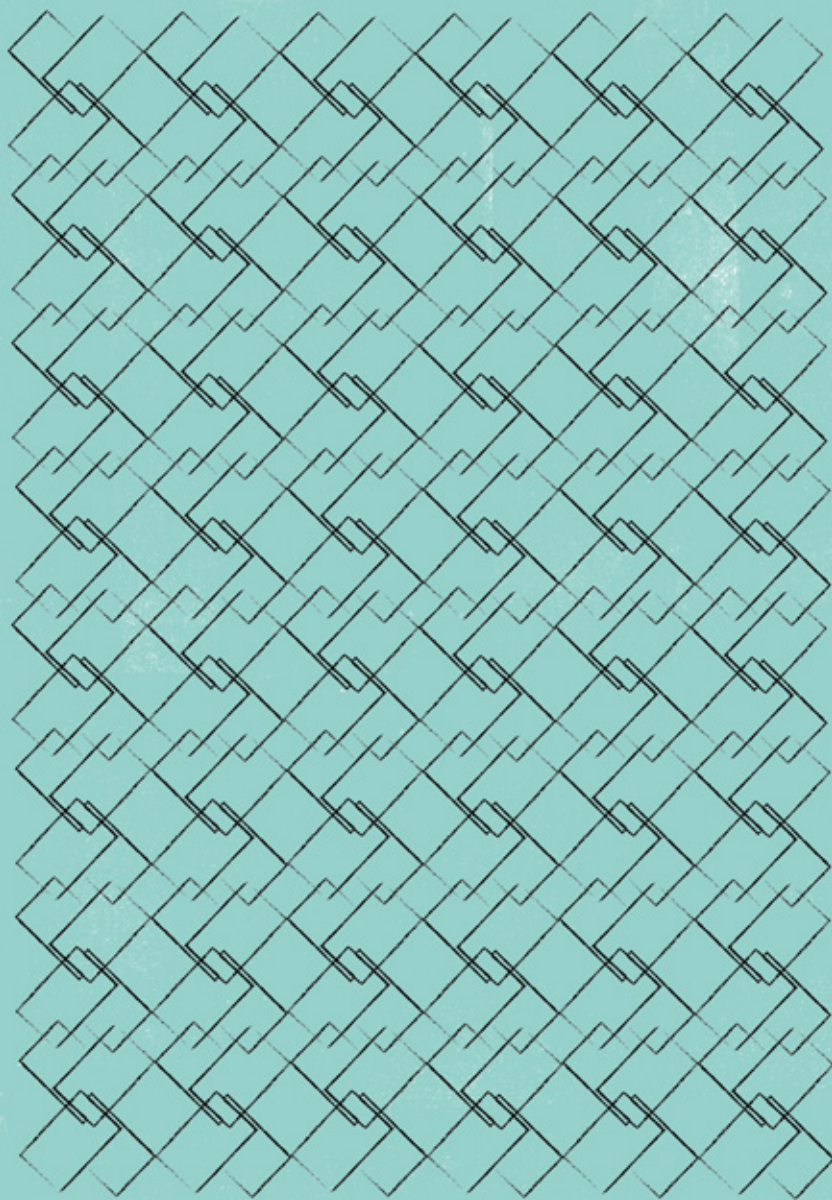
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E&C



## SEEING WITH OTHER EYES

Either draw some glasses or make them using card and translucent paper. You are making glasses to help others 'see like a student/academic/administrator'. How do things look from your perspective? Start by explaining the partnership but move on to the University and teaching and learning. Explain how and why.





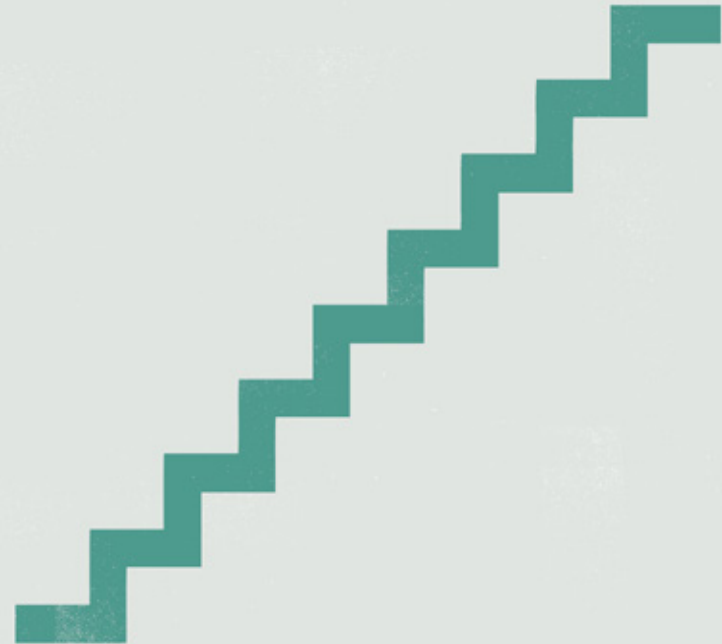
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## CELEBRATE

As important as it is to celebrate our great achievements we also need to recognise the work that goes on all the time to make these possible. Using triangles of paper (folded over and stapled to make a channel for the string) make bunting. On each flag write or draw examples of the everyday and mundane work that is done as part of your partnership. You could also record who does that work.

T&amp;S



## STEPS

Find some stairs (or a lift). If your partnership is on a middle step (floor), what was on the one below? What about the following one? Where does your partnership lead to? Find a way to represent these stages on the stairs or the lift. (Avoid trip hazards! We want to ask people to take a long view – not to trip them up.).



